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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT (FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY) Thursday, February 18, 1937.

Subject: "TRACKING IN MUD." Information from the Bureau of Animal Industry and Agricultural Engineering, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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"River, stay away from my door!" was the song of one happy-go-lucky resident of the flood area. He was sitting on his steps playing his banjo, idly watching the waters rise. They soon put him to work bringing sand bags to build up the levee, which seems a more effective way of stopping the river that singing a song to it.

"Mud, stay away from my door," is what many a housewife would like to say, but she wouldn't just sing a song about it. She'd get something done, if she could -- something to prevent the everlasting tracking in. Especially when spring thaws loosen up the earth in the back yard before there are enough grass roots to hold it in place.

For some inexplicable reason there are farmers who will use concrete in a lot of ways around the barn -- put in paved floors and feeding troughs and other conveniences made from this cleanly material, yet stop just short of a paved walk-way to the kitchen door, leaving the muddy or dusty foot-path as it has always been, and perhaps deeply rutted tracks between the paved highway and the garage. It isn't always a matter of expense or trouble. Sometimes it's just lack of thought.

We women know that a lot of tracking in could be prevented. The first thing is to stop the mud from reaching the doorsteps, particularly the back doorstep. Even so small a thing as a foot-scraper or a rough door mat will help. If a continuous concrete path to the barnyard is not desired, perhaps because you have planned some grading later on, how about making some concrete stepping stones?

The Bureau of Agricultural Engineering says they are not difficult for the man of the house or the older boys to make, if the need is pointed out and a little feminine pressure brought to bear on the subject. Stepping stones can be cast in place or precast. If they are precast they should not be too large, or they will be too heavy to handle. A block of concrete 16 by 16 inches and 4 inches thick weighs about 85 to 90 pounds. Such blocks can be made indoors at odd times during cold weather and put in place when the outside temperature is right.

This idea reminds me of the flat field stones which are imbedded in my sister's lawn, making a stepping stone walk out to the garage. The stones are the same general size but of different shapes and are set so that there is about an inch of short grass growing between the stones. The walk-way spreads out into a flagstone terrace by the back steps. It is six feet or so wide and extends along the back of the house to join another stepping stone walk around to the side porch. The crevices between the stones in this terrace are planted with portulaca, which blooms with gay, short-stemmed red and yellow flowers through the hottest weather. How much nicer to have a flower-embroidered stone carpet at the door-step than the same area of mud or dusty earth!

Natural flat stones are not to be had everywhere, but concrete makes an excellent substitute. Those who like trim square blocks can cast them in forms and set them where they will be most convenient. Then if yard changes are necessary, the blocks can be taken up and put somewhere else.

However, for permanent stepping stones, it is much less trouble to cast them right in place without using forms. Irregular shaped slabs of concrete will give the artistic effect of natural field stones. All that is necessary is to remove any sod and excavate the soil a few inches deep so that the hole has the desired shape with vertical edges. If the ground is poorly drained, especially if of clay, it may be necessary to go down 9 or 10 inches and fill up 5 or 6 inches with firmly packed sand as a drainage bed for the stepping stone, Then put in the 4 inches of concrete.

If there are reasons for not using concrete, coarse clean gravel is better than mud, sand, ashes or cinders. The stones should be large enough not to stick to the shoes. They should be round pebbles rather than sharp cut gravel, so they will not hurt the feet in thin shoes, or cut shoe leather. Water worn stones from a lake or brook make a very good, dry, mudless footpath.

Of course one of the biggest reasons for the housewife's dislike of tracking in is that it makes her so much work. Another is a health reason. When mud on the floor is not promptly washed off, it dries and scatters dust, which settles on the furniture, then gets on people's skin and clothing. This isn't "good clean dirt," as we sometimes say of white beach sand along the ocean shore. It's certainly dirty dirt if it comes from the barnyard, and it may be the means of spreading disease. Some diseases and parasites of farm animals can be transmitted to human beings. One way of doing so is through contact with mud or dust from the barnyard.

Tuberculosis is one of these diseases. Roundworms of swine are a typical parasite. There are other troubles of this kind. The trail can be easily imagined. Boots with germ-laden mud track into the entry or kitchen. Mud dries, flies about as dust. A germ or two finds a resting place on dishes, food, or fingers. Someone is ill.

Why not establish what we might call a "home quarantine station?" Especially while the muddy season lasts. It could be out in the woodshed or in a special outside washing-up place. If the muddy boots and overalls can there be changed for fresh clothing and left outside, there would be less risk from dangerous dirt. And of course, less tracking in, and work for the housewife.

But a clean walk-way is needed, too, from the barn to the house. This is a good time of year to enlist a little cooperation and get an attractive concrete stepping stone walk constructed.

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